

WORK PACKAGE 2

Final Report about Transnational Peer Review Experimentation: Checklist & Focus Groups with relevant stakeholders

Project
P.R.I.S.D.O.Q.

“Peer Reviews:
Increasing Sustainable
Development
Of Quality”

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WP 1: Experimentation of Transnational Peer Review by each partner

WP 2: Sharing of criticism and strengths about the application of Transnational Peer Review

WP 3: Working out the “Executive Plan for a sustainable management of the Transnational Peer Review”

WP 4: Experimentation of the “Executive Plan for a sustainable management of the Transnational Peer Review” in each partner country

WP 5: Monitoring and evaluation of the achieved results

WP 6: Dissemination

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This report presents the project activities between April and September 2012 concerning work package no. 2 and summarizes important results.

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1. The Project P.R.I.S.D.O.Q.

P.R.I.S.D.O.Q. primarily aims at supporting the implementation of transnational Peer Reviews at European level, by involving VET providers from Italy, Germany, Turkey, a Social Partner from Lithuania (VET Trade Union) and a Regional Body of the Italian VET System (Regione Umbria). Consequently, it intends to share the structure and process developed by the Thematic Group of ENQAVET. The project started with a period of experimentation of Transnational Peer Review among the participating project partners. The European Peer Review Manual and the Tool box were the basic tools to apply the methodology to transnational VET providers. In that way, further use and evaluation of the results of the three previews Leonardo da Vinci projects on Peer Review was possible.

During the period of experimentation (Work Package No. 1) the partners were able to adopt all central roles in Transnational Peer Reviews: each partner acted as either peer coordinator, transnational peer or hosting institution. Through this, experiences from different point of views were possible and practices were shared by a wider community.

The analysis of the experimentation has led to practical suggestions and recommendations. It represents a useful tool for all those actors who want to start implementing Peer Review or other self-evaluation processes.

By experimenting, verifying and consequently validating the actions suggested in the "Proposal for structure and process for Transnational European Peer Reviews", P.R.I.S.D.O.Q. can support the strategy of the Member States to improve their QA approach in VET as foreseen by the EU recommendation.

2. The experimentation – Transnational Peer Reviews (Work Package No. 1)

For a detailed documentation of the aims, processes and results of the experimentation see "Report about Transnational Peer Review Experimentation" (Work Package No. 1).

3. The experimentation – Meta-reflection (Work Package No. 2)

Work Package No. 2 aims at the meta-reflection of the experimentation. It results in the sharing of criticisms and strengths of the application of Transnational Peer Review (check list). The partners' direct experiences with the Peer Review procedure had been considered a pre-condition for a proper understanding of the methodology and the detection of strengths but also weaknesses and difficulties. Now, having done so, the partners reflected on and analysed their experiences from an individual (national and organizational) point of view and pointed out criticism, disadvantages, advantages and strengths of Transnational Peer Review at European level. Additionally, the point of view of different national stakeholders was taken into account for instance through focus group discussions. This process was supported by external evaluation experts (Benedetta De Marsanich – Evaluator DNV Italia, Giorgio Allulli – Expert of Peer Review, Ex-National Coordinator and Reference Point for QA).

By involving quite heterogeneous actors in the experimentation (small-sized European VET-providers, local government, social partner), the results of the meta-reflection mirror the different individual needs, framework conditions and objectives.

The meta-reflection focused on two perspectives:

- 1) The efficacy of Peer Review (not only Transnational) as an instrument of quality assurance and development for VET providers and the education system in general;
- 2) The applicability of the instrument in different institutional and organizational contexts (micro-VET providers, training centres within enterprises, big VET centres, etc.).

Finally, the partners produced a check list that points out what VET-providers can gain from implementing Peer Review and how this methodology could be further improved to promote a wider adoption in Europe.

The "Checklist of Advantages and Disadvantages" was developed as the main result at the end of the experimentation period. Starting from the first Peer Review all partners had contributed to develop the criteria and indicators to point out what has been experienced as helpful or not. Once that all project partners had agreed on the items to express advantages and disadvantages, the Italian coordinator Forma.Azione finalised the check list. Then each partner analysed individually its own experiences during the Peer Reviews and discussed it with important local stakeholders (focus groups). PERSPEKTIVwechsel summed up these individual results and prepared a document to provide an overview.

During the second project meeting in Cologne/Germany the final results were shared. The partners compared the data and analysis of the experimentation and the reflected check lists and discussed it.

Work Package n. 2	Sharing of criticism and strengths about the application of Transnational Peer Review																							
Package Leader	Perspektiv-Wechsel, Germany																							
Aims	Evaluation and check of the application process experimented in the first phase, to point out criticism, disadvantages, advantages and strengths for implementing Peer Review at European level.																							
Activities	April 2012				May 2012				June 2012				July 2012				August 2012				Sept. 2012			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Finalise the check list	x	x	x	x																				
Individual analysis of the results, based on the check list, by each partner (SWOT)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x										
Share the analysis between partners (moodle), intermediate discussions					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x						
Focus groups (or other methods) done by all partners on local/regional/national level													x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Prepare the 2nd Project Meeting in Cologne/Germany																					x	x	x	x
<i>Summary of the analysis (by Perspektivwechsel)</i>																					x	x	x	x
2nd Project Meeting, 24.-26.09. in Cologne/Germany																								
<i>Compare data and analysis</i>																								
<i>Sum up and share final results</i>																								
<i>Final reporting</i>																								
<i>Update Moodle</i>																								

The Check List Summary

The following Check List is the result of the evaluation of the experimentation. It summarizes the meta-reflection on the experimentation.

ADVANTAGES IN USING EUROPEAN PEER REVIEW METHODOLOGY

1	Makes VET Providers be actively involved into quality assurance process
	The management of VET Providers gets actively involved in quality assurance of learning process during the preparation, implementation and evaluation of PR. Relevant information is collected, stored and analysed regularly and communicated to all.
2	Supports VET Providers in finding new ways to quality improvement
	In all TPR experimented the Peers' feedback enlighten central aspects of VET providers organizations also reinforcing their awareness about possible ways to improvement.
3	Is transferable to the work based education in SME in different sectors, e.g. nursing homes, factories, NGO in third sector
	The methodology needs to be adapted to be transferable to the work based education in SME in different sectors.
4	Is applicable and adaptable in / to different (local / regional / national) contexts
	Peer Review methodology is easy applicable and adaptable in / to different (local / regional / national) contexts, it can contribute to the improvement of the quality of local / regional /national training provisions and is a good chance for mutual learning among the main actors of training and education processes at different levels.
5	Is useful and effective at transnational level
	The differences at cultural and national level among the systems stimulate discussion and allow meta-knowledge. Belonging to different contexts also facilitate opening and exchange between Vet providers if they are open to new perspectives and approaches.
6	Is useful and manageable for Micro-VET-Providers in quality assurance
	TPR is useful and manageable for Micro-VET-Providers, especially in comparison to ISO audits which may be more expensive and bureaucratic. But some adjustments in terms of criteria, descriptors and indicators, for the main quality area would be very useful.
7	It encourages using the evaluation results for continuous quality improvement.
	TPR helps to develop and implement a continuous quality improvement program but it also depends on the level of commitment of all members in the organisation.
8	Makes it possible to learn from good practices and experiences of others and of different VET contexts
	TPR offers opportunities for trans-regional and transnational communication, not only for partner institutions but also between communities and cultural institutions in all participating countries. As such it promotes intercultural dialogue and exchange of perspectives, methods, experiences and good practice.

9	Reinforces the willingness for self-evaluation as a regular practice of the VET providers
	TPR sets standards that encourage continuous improvement in self-evaluation area.
10	Improves the staff competences for self-evaluation
	TPR can improve the staff competences for self-evaluation if the dissemination process in the institution / organisation is good and the management system is strong, because not all staff is involved into TPR.
11	Helps to overcome stereotypical points of view, e.g. one best way to approach the quality
	TPR helps to overcome stereotypical points of view because it supports the comprehension of different cultural basic assumptions.
12	Stimulates to accept critical suggestions and assessments
	TPR is a great opportunity to stimulate the competence to accept critical suggestions and assessments and to use suggestions in the future.
13	Reduces the resistance of Micro-level-VET Providers to be externally evaluated
	The friendly and constructive way in which the Peer Review is developed could help some Micro-level-VET Providers to overcome the resistance to be evaluated externally.
14	Strengthens recognition and mutual trust between VET Providers from different countries and regions (Transnationality reduces competition between VET Providers (= peers) during quality development process)
	The implementation of TPR methodology could foster transparency, mutual trust, recognition of VET providers and develop the right balance between qualitative and quantitative approaches to QA. Additionally it offers the chance to support mobility of VETPRO.
15	Strengthens recognition and mutual trust between VET Providers, Stakeholders and social partners
	Mutual trust between VET Providers, Stakeholders and social partners is an important requirement and result of TPR at the same time.
16	Creates a common basis to enhance a better cooperation between VET Providers
	Cooperation between VET providers on a transnational level is stimulated more easily than on local / regional level.
17	Encourages and facilitates mobility of educators, VET management staff, VET decision makers, trainee and students
	TPR has the potential to enable the mobility of all by giving more opportunities and opening new horizons

DISADVANTAGES IN USING EUROPEAN PEER REVIEW METHODOLOGY

1	<p>Needs time and resources for preparation of Peer Review: writing the self-report (hosts), translation of documents, reading the report (guests) etc.</p>
	<p>All partners agree. It is correctly remarked that other methods for quality assurance need time too, that it is necessary to spend time on it and that TPR is voluntary.</p>
2	<p>The efficacy is exclusively under responsibility of the Peers directly involved (e.g.: conflict of interest, confidentiality, following procedures, absence of external third part control)</p>
	<p>All partners agree. It is recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - that training of peers is a key action - to set up a register of peers (locally, nationally, European) - to start certification of skills - to engage in wide application of the method
3	<p>In absence of a peers network (both at national and European level) the dissemination of the methodology requires time and previous direct contact / knowledge between the organizations involved</p>
	<p>All partners agree. However, it is remarked that time and contact is relevant for other quality assurance activities, too, not only for TPR. It is recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to create a formal/institutional framework to ensure wider dissemination - to create a network of peers
4	<p>Different languages, different cultural backgrounds and VET systems of the Peers involved</p>
	<p>Partners agree in general. It is recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - that the specific national VET system is carefully explained in the self report and read by the peers - that generally a good preparation is needed, e.g. basic knowledge of cultural phenomena in a country - that possible misunderstandings due to language are addressed in the peer visit - that peers should train their language and cultural skills - that diversity should be appreciated and respected
5	<p>High detail of tools provided by the PR Methodology</p>
	<p>The partners agree that the tools need to be reflected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the TPR overview should be added to the toolbox - some tools should be adjusted - it should be possible to deal with tools more flexible - some tools should be used more comprehensively - there should be a good balance between simplification and common agreement to ensure the quality of the methodology
6	<p>Absence of addressed funding for travel and staff costs</p>
	<p>All partners agree that funding is necessary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - at European and national level - from the organizations themselves - connected to mobility actions - for sustainability reasons

4. The Focus Groups Summary

Additionally to the experiences of the experimentation, the partners asked for opinions, views and experiences in focus groups on national/local level. The focus groups reflected on (assumed) advantages and disadvantages of Transnational Peer Reviews, made comments and recommendations for a sustainable implementation.

Summary of National Focus Groups

Black Germany *No documentation of focus groups received from Turkey.*
 Red Italy
 Blue Lithuania

(assumed) advantages for transnational peers	(assumed) disadvantages for transnational peers
TPR broadens one's horizon, has a learning effect: what other VET providers do can be considered for the own institution, too. This enhances self reflexion and widens perspectives	VET providers differ in quality very much. There can be the problem that expectations of the peers are too high. Expectations that are relevant in the peers' home country must be reflected and adjusted.
„the prophet in his home town" is not taken as seriously as an outside expert.	It is difficult to evaluate data that are specific to a country.
Mobility on the European labour market is encouraged	Preparation, peer visit, report are time consuming activities. Staff does not want to spend the time, leaders are perhaps more open.
	No funding.
	It is difficult to empathize with other cultures and develop understanding for the different cultural context.
	Language.
	A "peer to peer contact" is sometimes not possible. Some institutions, e.g. in eastern Europe, tend to "look up" to German peers and expect concrete suggestions how to make things better.
	The organization does not allow the peer deep insights into its processes (mistrust)

(assumed) advantages for the hosting institution	(assumed) disadvantages for the hosting institution
An external person looks at internal processes. This is a chance to learn from external perceptions.	I cannot put the recommendations of the peers in action because I cannot change the system. That can be frustrating.
TPR allows a completely different view than national PR. This makes possible to gain new insights and impulses.	It is additional work and can overstrain resources (too much time, effort, costs)
Process of rising awareness. VET providers are stimulated to reflect issues of the institutions.	The favoured outcome of the review influences the self report and presentation
Development and innovation are quality aspects themselves.	The review is not dealt with in a confidential way. Negative aspects are given away to others.
It is voluntary.	Recruiting of peers who can and want to do reviews is difficult (not enough time, no funding, demanding task)
New networks and contacts will develop.	Fear that control is exercised.
It strengthens the individual responsibility and makes people more willing to move ("kick")	Too much empathy, justification, apology reduce the quality of processes and results.
The instrument can be dealt with individually.	Unclear roles, processes and criteria can make PR difficult and lead to bad results.
TPR promotes identity.	Nepotism and conspiracy between peer and host
The 14 Quality areas are attractive because the focus lies on content not on formal procedures.	The TPR is an isolated action and doesn't connect to everyday life.
Organisations can use TPR as an additional quality procedure to develop areas that are not covered by other procedures (e.g. ISO)	Why shall I do it? What are the advantages? TPR is no accredited procedure! Authorities promote formal procedures that are recognized.
Transnationality mitigates competition	The peers are not competent.
PR is a further instrument to achieve the demanded standard of quality in VET.	Delayed introduction of the new Regional Accreditation System to evaluate "Efficacy/ Efficiency" of quality assurance procedures can reduce the acceptance. No one is interested in it unless it is connected with the current regional accreditation system.
PR is a useful method for competitors. Both can benefit.	Lack of financial resources.
Possibility to promote the provision of training in a region and to cut down those who do not invest in quality.	There is no strong commitment of the management of schools.
Evaluation that takes already place can be improved (Some Italian VET providers are highly interested to take part in developing it further).	

<p>PR is an important instrument to measure the quality results. It allows a diversity of opinions to be brought to the table, theoretically removing any personal biases and pre-set ideas.</p>	<p>The whole process can be very time consuming and expensive. Sometimes it is a lot of paper work.</p>
<p>The reviewers are experts in their field bring innovative research to the attention of the reviewed VET, where it may be used later.</p>	<p>Much of the decision about the quality - power rests in the hands of the peers, who are making the report. In most cases, this is fine, and helps the process to proceed smoothly, but it can lead to misuse of this authority.</p>
	<p>Confidentiality is not guaranteed (e.g. among competitors). Problematic if the peer has different point of views or expectations.</p>

Comments / Recommendations

- PR in times of consolidation yes, in times of change or crisis not.
- feedback must be given in a friendly way
- peers don't assess or judge and don't intervene
- it is up to the institution what it wants to change or not
- national value systems and hierarchies must be taken into account
- there is a balance between sticking to the criteria and openness
- peers try to find out what really is important to the institution at the moment
- there is a national and a transnational peer in the review
- peers should be highly skilled in qualification, language, personal and social competencies
- peers should have expertise in the quality area that has been chosen by the host
- the hosting organization should be allowed to select the peers (no assignment)
- there should be a responsible body that assesses the qualification and skills of the peers and gives recommendations
- cross-sectoral peers can be attractive
- Motivations (awarding instruments) are necessary to accelerate the implementation of PR (e.g. a direct connection to the regional accreditation system regarding the criterion "Efficacy/Efficiency of quality assurance").
- PR could be combined with regional audits. PR is better in promoting a culture of evaluation and continuous improvement than external assessment.
- the methods and competencies of the evaluation experts of Regione Umbria have to be improved
- important is the training for peers, maybe creation of a specific professional association or register for training professionals (with minimum standards)
- create a favourable and stimulating institutional framework
- it is important that the main objective (continuous improvement instead of external assessment) is fully understood
- institutions of different sub-sectors experiment with PR to raise acceptance
- include relevant stakeholder, experts from ITER, from other VET providers and from the region
- initiate pilot projects (e.B. with accredited but not ISO certificated VET centres ...)
- To better inform the other VET providers on the mechanism of peer review;
- To make clear what constitutes a good review by showing a good example;
- To help the other VET providers to understand what matters to peers about reviews;
- To give a help to the other VET providers in producing a good review
- the reviewers should be experts in their field, well acquainted with the latest developments in quality assurance area.
- The VET providers that use PR should enjoy an excellent reputation and be trusted by experts in the field.
- PR to a large extent depends on the integrity and competence of the people involved and the quality assurance of the peer review process itself.
- National quality assurance systems are diverse and reflect different traditions and philosophies of coordination and governance of education and training systems – the transnational peers should be well informed about this and take it into consideration before advising or suggesting the areas of improvement.

5. Conclusion

The experimentation of the partners and the focus group discussions made it clear that both peers and hosting institution can profit from the external evaluation “on equal footing” as it is conceived in the Transnational European Peer Review. It was commonly agreed that Peer Review

- increases the willingness to develop quality by reflexion and self-evaluation (in contrast to examination and assessment);
- broadens the horizon of all participants and has a sound learning effect;
- is adaptable to individual contexts;

The experimentation showed that in small-sized training institutions the management gets deeply involved in the Peer Review process; this improves the continuity of communication and evaluation processes within the organization. Differences of culture and national systems in Transnational Peer Reviews stimulate the discussion and enable a complete different view on the institution; this can be seen as challenge and chance at the same time.

(Transnational) Peer Review can be a successful means of quality development for training institutions and an interesting experience for transnational peers. Its effectiveness and sustainability depends on the side of the hosting institution on the personal responsibility and commitment of the members in the organisation, on evaluation skills and honesty concerning the self-evaluation processes and on well communicated and transparent information in the self-report.

Regarding the peers, the question of skills, competencies and qualification often appears. Effective training and preparation is absolutely necessary. Peers have to well understand the specific national and sectorial context without losing their neutral and objective stance and “critically friendliness”. For the whole Peer Review process the peer leader plays an important role. This person is mainly responsible that the preparation, evaluation and report phases run smoothly. It might be sensible that “peer leader” becomes a profession or is awarded a qualified status. Building up a network and community of peers, with a clear way to enter it, is important.

The check-list and the focus groups both addressed the problem that being a peer means to invest time and commitment and money. There could be a problem of recruiting enough peers if it isn't in some way appreciated/awarded and if it cannot be supported by the reviewed institution. Also the question of language problems often came up. One possible solution could be to build the peer teams in a way that both national and transnational peers are in it. Otherwise Peer Review risks to only include persons in the organization or stakeholders that are able to speak English well enough.

On the level of Peer Review as a systematic and formally recognized quality management system the question of accreditation arises. On the one hand Peer Review serves more as an instrument of institutional and professional development and not as a means of control. Motivation to implement Peer Review should therefore best be based on an (internal)

developmental approach. On the other hand a desirable wider implementation of Peer Review might be dependent on a formal accreditation.

What is definitely desirable is to create a wider network of peers and organizations that want to take part in Peer Review on a transnational level. The benefits for VET providers, their staff and their students are high: Peer Review helps to make people engage in quality development, it enables contacts and relations between different nations and creates an atmosphere of mutual learning.